

[Arthur Goodlett]

GGD:LL [260?] Dups

FORM A Circumstances of Interview.

NAME OF WORKER Fred D. Dixon ADDRESS 2889 Ohio St.

DATE SUBJECT Negro History

1. Name and address of informant. Arthur R. Goodlett, 2815 Binney St.
2. Date and time of interview. Nov. 16, 1938. 3:30 p.m. to 5:30 p.m.
3. Place of interview. In the home of Mr. Goodlett
4. Name and address of person, if any, who put you in touch with informant.

Mrs. Alice Robbins, 2316 N. 28th Ave.

5. Name and address of person, if any, accompanying you. No one.
6. Description of room, house, surroundings, etc. Mr. Goodlett and wife live in a very modern and well furnished home. This home is situated in about the best of the Negro district. The yard is well landscaped and well kept. The home is a modern six room bungalow. Worker interviewed Mr. Goodlett in the living room of the home, and it is by far the most unique home worker has been into. Everything in the home was of very good taste. Every room in the home is well situated and well furnished. [???

FORM B Personal History of Informant

NAME OF WORKER Fred D. Dixon ADDRESS 2889 Ohio St.

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DATE November 16, 1938 SUBJECT Negro History

NAME AND ADDRESS OF INFORMANT Arthur R. Goodlett, 2815 Binney St.

1. Ancestry. Mr. Goodlett is of Negro Ancestry.
2. Place and date of birth. Mr. Goodlett was born in Brewton Alabama in 1889.
3. Family. Mr. Goodlett's family consist of himself and wife Fannie. They have a son Carlton, who is teaching in the south.
4. Place lived in, with dates. Mr. Goodlett has lived in only one other place beside Brewton and Omaha. That place was Pensacola Florida in 1915.
5. Education, with dates. Mr. Goodlett's education is limited to the six grade. He attended night school to the eighth grade in Omaha but never graduated.
6. Occupations and accomplishments, with dates. At the present time Mr. Goodlett is foreman of Sanitation at the Cudahy packing company in Omaha. He has held this position for the past ten years. Prior to this appointment he worked in the laundry at Cudahy's as assistant boss.
7. Special skills and interests. Mr. Goodlett has no specials and his only interests seem to be religious activities.
8. Community and religious activities. Mr. Goodlett is a member of the St. John A.M.E. church. He is very active in Sunday School work and has taught a class in this department for a number of years. He has done a little community work, but has confined it to clubs.
9. Description of informant. Mr. Goodlett is a very short, slightly bald dark skinned man. He looks very much younger in age than he is. He has brown eyes, and short black hair.

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10. Other points gained in interview. Worker has known Mr. Goodlett for a number, but not until this interview did worker know just what capacity Mr. Goodlett worked in at the packing co.

FORM C Text of Interview (Unedited)

NAME OF WORKER Fred D. Dixon ADDRESS 2889 Ohio St.

DATE November 18, 1938 SUBJECT Negro History

NAME AND ADDRESS OF INFORMANT Arthur Goodlett, 2815 Binney St.

I was born in Brewton Alabama in 1889. I am the seventh child of a family of ten. At an early age I was forced to leave school, while yet in the sixth grade, to help earn a living for the family. My father earned a meager living working in the saw-mill, which was the chief industry of this city of 4,000. I was married in 1912 and as my wife was a school teacher we were forced to leave Brewton as she was appointed in a nearby small town, Century Alabama. It was while living in this town that I read of Omaha, Nebraska and the opportunities for Negroes in the packing industry. This information about Omaha was in the Florida Sentinel, a Negro paper that I was taking at the time. The Sentinel said that further information could be obtained by writing the Monitor, a Negro paper that was edited by Father John Albert Williams, and George Well Parker, in Omaha. I wrote for copies of the paper and corresponded with them regarding employment in the packing industry for Negroes. They wrote me that the packing company was anxious to have more Negroes come to Omaha and enter this branch of industry, I discussed this with several of the Negroes living in Brewton, and decided to leave there and try my luck in Omaha. One other person decided to come with me. His name is William Bradley. He has since left Omaha and is living in Brewton at this time.

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We left Brewton on March 10th, 1917, and arrived in Omaha on March 13th. We went directly to Father Williams' parish and he with George Parker talked with us for several hours, discussing Omaha and the possibilities that it offered for employment to a group of Negroes. We had decided that if Omaha did not seem the right spot to stop we would continue to Sioux City, Iowa, as there were several packing companies there also. They talked us out of this thought, and we spent the night with Mr. Parker. The next day we contacted the employment managers of the various packing companies and everything seemed fine. We went to work on the 15th of March in 1917 and haven't missed drawing check every pay-day since being in their employ. We wrote back that the packing companies were in need of additional workers and was willing to send for many more if they were willing to come to Omaha. The lacking company was so willing to have more men come to Omaha that they gave me the privilege of sending them their fare to Omaha and they payed me back. They were very short on help due to so many men being drafted for the war. During the summer several parties of about 25 men and women came to Omaha. The largest parties came in the fall after the crops had been reaped. These parties asked for special rates and received a reduction of \$5.00 on each adult ticket, when the groups contained 25 or more persons.

When I started to work at Cudahy's packing co. there were only six Negroes employed in the entire plant. This was due largely to the great number that had been taken out of the packing industry, by the war. Before the end of 1917 there were several hundred employed in the various departments of Cudahy alone. The packing company rewarded me, and also 3 due to my fine record with them by making me Supervisor of Sanitation over the entire plant.

It is estimated that over 300 came to Omaha from Brewton during the year 1917, and the majority entered the packing industry. Between the years 1917 and 1921 it is safe to say that over 1,000 Negroes came to Omaha from Brewton and surrounding territory. The majority of these Negroes came here seeking educational opportunity as well as industrial,

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and decided to stay here as they were quite satisfied by both. Most of them started to buy homes and began to spread out into various districts in north Omaha. In 1929 before the depression, the Negroes of Omaha had the largest per capita home owning or home buying population in the United States. Before the Brewton group arrived in Omaha Negroes had never thought much of buying homes, but they likewise started buying and this helped to swell the per capita. To show that this group was in earnest about education, and that they have made every effort to obtain at least a high school education, it is safe to say that 60% of all of the Brewton groups children finished grade school and high school and that 50% finished or attended University or College. These figures are my own as I have often thought of this little group that came here during this time. These figures might not be accurate but as the number of children that came during this time was so small it is easy to see that not very many would have to finish. However the number of Omaha born children of Brewton parentage has swelled the figures both for those that finished and those that quit. However I feel that every one that came here due to my word that Omaha was much better than Brewton has prospered in some manner.

4

Comments: Mr. Goodlett is perhaps one that came here with this group that has accomplished all of his aims at that time. He owns a nice home, has a very good job, and has educated his son. His wife however has lost her health in trying to help him secure these things. His son Carlton recently received his PHD degree from the University of Southern California. He is teaching school in South Carolina at the present time. Others have attained some degree of success but I don't believe quite as fully as Mr. Goodlett. 5

EARLY NEGRO HISTORY IN NEBRASKA

The first Negro to set foot on Nebraska soil was in 1539, when a Negro servant in the company of Fray Marcos, a monk of great ability, touched the south-eastern part of the state. He returned the following year with Coronado and again touched part of the state. This information is from McMasters History of the United States.

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Slavery never did secure very much of a foot-hold in Nebraska as evidenced by data given during this period. The first slave known of in Omaha was owned by an Indian squaw.— Palladium, August 16, 1854. Though no records show slavery as a popular industry in Omaha, local interest was evidenced by an article appearing in the, “Omaha Nebraskan,” which quotes the Chicago Times and Herald on the running away of Eliza, a slave, from Stephen A. Nuckolls, to Chicago, and her arrest November 12, 1860. The census of 1860 showed there were 81 Negroes in Nebraska, 10 of whom were slaves.— Kerns, 1931 in his social study of The Negro in Omaha.

According to the Omaha World Herald of November 16, 1938, one of the earliest Negro settlements in Nebraska was in Franklin county, where there was a Negro colony that helped settle that county between 1867 and 1871.

From 1880 to 1890 the Union Pacific railroad co. started to use many Negroes in various parts of their service, and this started a small migration to this part of the country. Many of those coming to Omaha were the families of the employees, others were friends of those already employed who were seeking employment. By 1890 the Negro population of Omaha had reached between 600 and 700. For the next twenty years the population did not make any noticeable changes but gradually the population was growing larger. From 1916 to 1922 the population made a vast increase. The largest growth in population was from 1917 to 1920, when Negroes in various southern states, and in Alabama, Texas, Arkansas, and Florida, in particular, started their northern migration. The packing industry was affording many Negroes an opportunity to earn a higher wage than they could earn in the southern states in the cotton industry, and in the sawmills that were chief industry of most of the Negroes. Omaha also afforded a better educational opportunity for their children, which was upper-most in their minds.

The Negroes have accomplished many of the things that they set out to do by migrating to Omaha, and they will be recorded in later interviews.

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The following is from part of works of Atty. H.J. Pinkett, who gave this interview to Miss Ida M. Dugan, former Federal Writers employee.

“According to some authorities, the Negro People first came into the southern part of Nebraska with Cornnado in 1541. Three were with Marquette when he explored Nebraska in 1673, and a Negro slave named York, the property of Clark, was with Lewis and Clark when they came to the place where Omaha now stands, in 1805.

In 1842 Thomas Brown came to the place which is now Omaha with his master from Missouri on a Buffalo hunt. Subsequently, Thomas Brown escaped from slavery into Canada and the story of his flight from bondage makes an epic. After slavery was abolished in the United States, he established a home in Grand Rapids, Mich., where he lived for many years. About twenty years ago he came to Omaha and resided with his daughter until his death at the age of 95.

7

His story of his first visit to the place where Omaha now stands in 1842 reveals that there was no white settlement here, and only the Indians living according to their native customs, habits and manners,

In later years, other Negroes came in small numbers or were brought as slaves and some of them were sent from Omaha to be sold on the auction block in neighboring cities.

The states and countries and territories from whence they came are Texas, Alabama, Kansas, Missouri, Oklahoma, Arkansas, Mississippi, Iowa, Illinois, Michigan, Florida, Louisiana, Georgia, North Carolina, Tenn., Ohio, Maryland, New Jersey, Rhode Island, Conn., South Carolina, the District of Columbia and Virginia. A few came from the West Indies, one from Jamaica, and two from Haiti.

The population increased slowly from 1867 to 1916, at which time the war-time migration from the south increased the population of Omaha. After the war, the migration continued

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and reached a total of 15,000 by 1926 and then declined through distribution of the population through neighboring states until, in 1930, there were fewer than 12,000 Negroes in Omaha. The estimated number now is 14,000.

Individuals in the group vary in color from black to white, many of them having less than 1/16 of African blood. (The statutes of Nebr. makes all persons having 1/8 or more of African blood Negroes). Thus, the near-white persons of color are made Negroes through exclusion of the latter group. 8 Some of the Pioneers

Interesting in the population are the Negro pioneers. In the late 1860's, Smith Coffey, the blacksmith, settled here, and there followed shortly afterwards July Miles, Benton Bell, Cyrus D. Bell, E.R. Overall, DR. W.H. Stephenson, Thomas Wheeler, Dr, M.O. Ricketts, Silas Robbins, B.H. Hall, John Flanagan, E.W. Proyer, Millard Singleton, Prof. Geo. McPherson, Harry Currey, Rev, John Albert Williams, Thomas P. Mahammitt, F.L. Barnett, Alphonso Wilson, Alfred Jones, Mother Leeper, Nate Brows, and Claus Hubbard.

Of this number only two are now living, and they are July Miles and Thomas Mahammitt. There are relatives of just about all of the others living.